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China Lags in Testing Missiles, U.S. Reports

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Red China is nearly a year late testing its first long-range missiles, and Pentagon officials say the lag may allow the United States to put off starting a controversial defense system tailored to the Chinese threat.

"We don't see any evidence of Chinese preparations for an ICBM test," one official said.

Defense sources said the U.S. government has information that elements pushing Mao Tse Tung's cultural revolution have been harassing nuclear and missile scientists and managers.

For a long time, U.S. authorities felt that these elite specialists were exempt from attack as China placed an apparent top priority on developing an intercontinental ballistics missile arsenal.

In January 1967, then Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara forecast to Congress that Red China might stage a long-range missile test before the end of 1967.

McNamara predicted last September that Red China would have "an initial intercontinental ballistic missile capability in the early 1970s."

With a slippage of at least a year in testing the first Chinese ICBM, it is logical to assume that the Chinese effort to devel-

op a full weapon system is lagging.

This, in turn, would seem to ease the urgency of going ahead with deployment soon of a U.S. system designed to guard the United States against a possible Chinese missile attack.

Officials said there has been some discussion in the Pentagon of whether or not the Sentinel antimissile system deployment should be stretched out.

There has been no change in the decision to go ahead with the \$5 billion Sentinel, these officials said, but the possibility has been raised of deferring its start for some months.

The discussions come at a time when the Defense Department is searching for ways to cut spending this fiscal year by \$3 billion.

The cutbacks so far total only about \$500 million.

The defense appropriation bill for this bookkeeping year includes about \$324 million toward deployment of the antimissile system. Delays usually mean higher costs.

Talk of a possible delay in starting the system comes at a time when the administration is still anxious, despite the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, to begin summit talks with Moscow on curbing the missile race.